

GABBS VALLEY RANGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

I. THE STUDY AREA - 79,600 Acres

The Gabbs Valley Range WSA (NV-030-407) is located in Mineral County, 30 miles east of Hawthorne, Nevada. The WSA contains 79,600 acres of BLM lands and one 40 acre private inholding. Three other private parcels are nearly surrounded by the WSA and were excluded (cherrystemmed) from the WSA. The WSA is bounded on the northwest by roads and mining disturbance around Poinsettia Spring Mine, and on the northeast side by a combination of the main Finger Rock Wash Road, lesser roads, mining disturbance near roads, and by a private property boundary. The remaining boundary around the southern end of the unit is comprised of a combination of State Highway 23, the main road in Petrified Wash, lesser roads, mining disturbances and private property boundaries. The WSA is approximately 16 miles in length from north to south and varies in width from 3 to 15 miles east to west.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - **0 acres recommended for wilderness** **79,600 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 79,600 acres for uses other than wilderness. The recommendation to release the Gabbs Valley Range WSA from further wilderness consideration would allow for exploration and development of mineral resources to continue, particularly in the southern third and northwest portion of the area where there is a moderate to high potential for the occurrence of metallic minerals. In addition, approximately 1,400 acres in the vicinity of Redrock Canyon would be available for firewood cutting.

The high and moderate potential for the occurrence of mineral resources in different parts of the WSA, combined with continuing interest in the area by mining claimants, is evidence that in the future this area could produce significant quantities of mineral resources.

While the wilderness values described in the Section 2(c) criteria of the Wilderness Act of 1964 are present, these values are not of sufficient quality or quantity so as to outweigh the benefits of other resource values and uses, particularly the potential for mineral development, which would be foregone due to wilderness designation. The WSA does not contain any single feature or combination of features, such as vegetation, scenery, wildlife, geology and historic features, significant enough to balance such a loss of opportunities and warrant its designation as wilderness.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Gabbs Valley Range WSA is predominantly natural with the majority of human imprints located around the periphery and near the approximately 10 miles of cherrystemmed roads that penetrate the unit. The majority of man's imprints, associated with past and recent mining activity and access routes, were excluded from the WSA during the wilderness inventory process. Several vehicle ways, approximately 22 miles in total, penetrate the WSA. Most of the isolated springs in the area have been developed for grazing and wild horse management.

B. Solitude: The large size of the unit is conducive to outstanding opportunities for solitude. The opportunity for solitude is excellent in the center of the unit around Red Rock Canyon due to the presence of ridges and pinyon-juniper that isolate the visitor from the human developments found around the edge of the unit.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Travel by foot and horseback is fairly easy throughout the

area without the need for constructed trails. Access to any part of the WSA is good, but there are few points of interest to attract a visitor. The far southern end contains interesting badland scenery located adjacent to mining activity. The drainages on the north side of Mt. Ferguson and Petrified Wash on the south, would provide the most interesting access to the highest point of the unit. Scenic quality is not outstanding, but is most pleasing in the basin of Redrock Canyon. There is little in the remainder of the WSA that distinguishes it from numerous other Great Basin mountain ranges, or which makes it particularly unique. Elements of challenge are associated with the typical Great Basin climate (i.e. hot, dry summers, cold winters), the rugged terrain and the relatively limited amount of water found in the area. Hunting and trapping occur in the area.

D. Special Features: An estimated 200 wild horses inhabit most of the study area, which adds an element of interest.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The Gabbs Valley Range WSA could be managed in order to preserve its wilderness character, but there would be some difficulties in doing so. The public has for years been using more than a dozen vehicle ways which would be closed if the area were designated wilderness. In addition, off-road vehicle travel is easy in much of the area. There are many points around the perimeter where off-road vehicles could enter the area if the main access ways were closed.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Approximately 27 percent of the WSA is considered to have moderate to high favorability for the occurrence of metallic minerals. The occurrence of intrusive bodies in probable contact with favorable host rocks, adjacent known mineralization, and exploration interest in the area is the basis for this rating. The entire WSA has moderate to low favorability for the occurrence of non-metallic minerals (primarily diatomite and sand/gravel deposits). It also has a moderate to low favorability for geothermal resources.

The WSA has a low favorability for uranium deposits and it is not considered favorable for the discovery of oil or gas. The possibility exists for the occurrence of two Strategic or Critical Minerals, copper and tungsten.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

A total of 37 comments, which specifically mentioned the Gabbs Valley Range WSA, were received during public review of the Draft Walker RMP/EIS. Nineteen commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Eighteen commentors supported no wilderness.

Those favoring wilderness stated that wilderness values in the area deserving protection. Those opposing designation cited the presence of roads, private inholdings, extensive mineral values and activity, and a lack of genuine wilderness values in the area.

The U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service commented in favor of wilderness designation. The Air Force stated that areas of sparse population that are appropriate for overflights are becoming rare. The Fish and Wildlife Service expressed the need to preserve wildlife habitat from the effects of mining. The State of Nevada, through the Governor's Consistency Review process, opposed wilderness designation because the area is highly mineralized. Several other federal agencies including the National Park Service, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Department of Energy, and the Bureau of Reclamation commented on the Draft RMP/EIS. These agencies did not identify any specific conflicts.